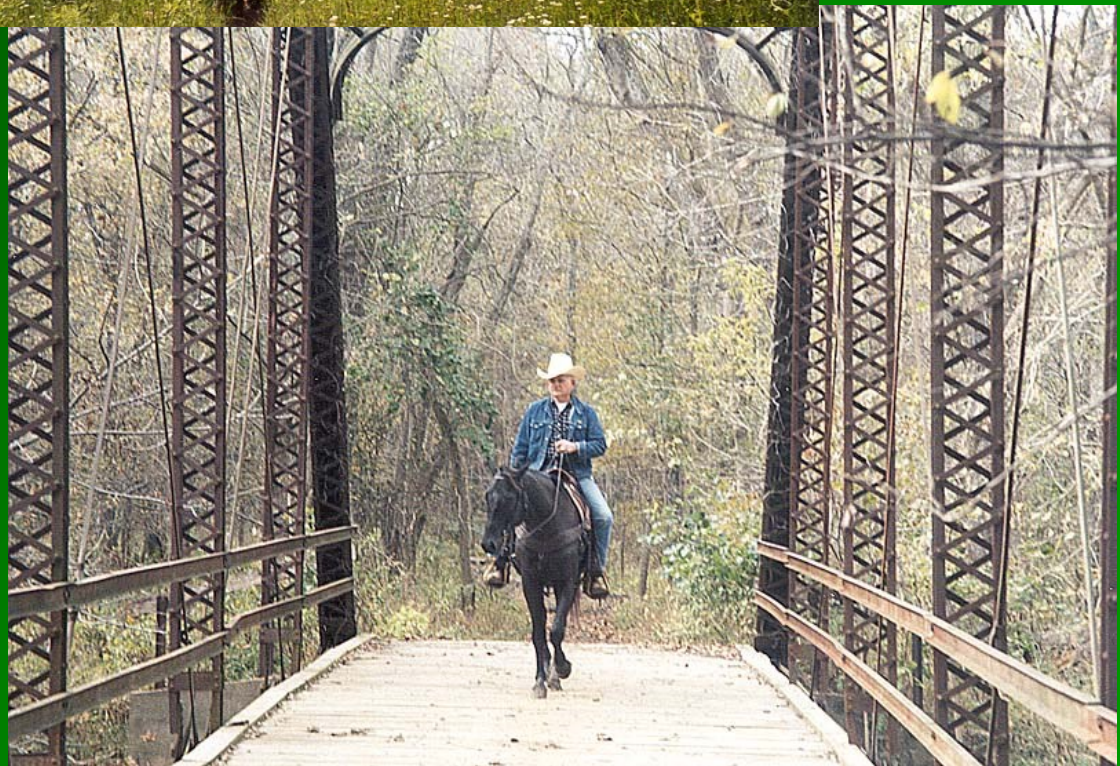




MDC Resource Science

Horse Trails on Public Lands: Who Rides Where and What Do They Want?

Science Notes



Horse Trails on Public Lands: Who Rides Where and What Do They Want?

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Information Needs: Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) area managers and administrators have noted a lack of useable information about horse trails and horseback riders on MDC lands. Managers need to know what horseback riders want and what they would accept regarding trail development and maintenance, facility needs, and conflict management with other types of users. Managers also need more information on who the riders are, how often they recreate, and what they require for a quality recreational experience.

Public Attitude Survey

In the 2003 "Your Ideas Count" survey [Rikoon et al. 2004] MDC asked Missourians how great the need was for horse trails within 20 minutes of home:

- 16.4% said "great need" and
- 21.8% said "some need".

Asked what they would like to do or have at a conservation area, 23.7% of respondents said they "definitely" wanted to "ride horseback on riding trails" and 32.6% said that "maybe" they would like to "ride horseback on riding trails".

MDC Managers Survey

To get a better picture of the situation on MDC lands, an area managers survey was developed. The need for a complete picture meant that the survey was sent to all areas, not just those with designated trails or those over a certain size.

Managers reported:

- Areas with horseback riding use: 183
- Areas with horseback riding on roads : 140
- Designated horse trails¹: 47
- Special permits for horseback riding: 71
- Commercial use related to horseback riding: 11
- Group use related to horseback riding: 54
- Areas with "unauthorized" horseback riding: 87
- Areas with horse-caused erosion: 55

¹ This is the number of areas reported by managers and is not the number of officially designated horse trails maintained by MDC.

Focus Groups

MDC also held focus groups with riders of varying levels of experience at the Cross County Trail Ride in Eminence. Riders provided input on what they feel makes a good trail and how far they are willing to travel to ride. They also shared experiences, both positive and negative, with other

types of recreational users. Key findings included:

- Undisturbed natural beauty or at least the perception of it was highly valued,
- Clear-cutting was seen as detracting from the recreational experience, and
- Horse riders travel long distances at great expense and as a result want their trail ride experience to reflect that.

Meeting Public Needs

In cooperation with the US Forest Service, National Park Service, and Missouri Department of Natural Resources, MDC has developed an up-to-date Geographic Information System layer of public horse trails and used travel-time estimation software to show that the needs of most Missourians related to horseback riding are close to being fulfilled. Over 70% of Missourians already live within 30 minutes of a horse trail on public land (Fig 1).

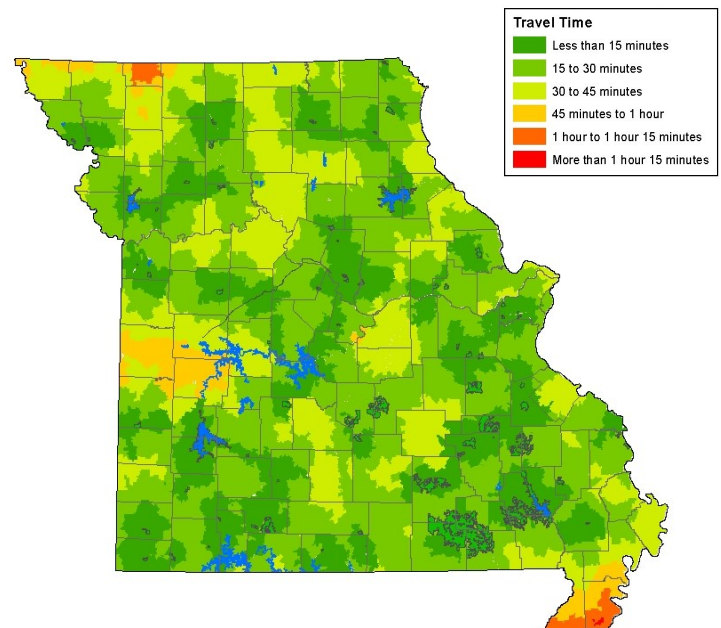


Figure 1. Travel Time to Nearest Public Area with Horse Use

Ongoing Efforts: MDC is conducting a mail survey of horse owners, riders, saddle clubs and other interest groups. This survey is gathering information to assist MDC managers with trail planning and management.

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